A Critique of Eurocentric Social Science and the Question of Alternatives

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Following a critical examination of existing theoretical framework within which social sciences are taught and researched in various universities of the non-western world, it is proposed that not just the content but even the assumptions and methodologies have been uncritically imported from the European academic tradition. Though the critique of Eurocentrism in the social sciences is well accepted, there is very little display of either courage or determination among academics in non-western universities in raising their own distinct set of assumptions that would enable them to work and conduct meaningful research outside the framework of western academic preoccupations and interests.

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In January 2010, the Department of Sociology (DOS) of Delhi University formally inaugurated a brand new European study centre at its premises funded by the European Union. The centre would help in the "redesign of the existing sociology syllabi of the MA and MPhil programme at DOS" in consultation with European scholars. The Europeans were willing to pay 3,00,000 euros for the two-year programme of the centre.[1]

The question we may rather impolitely ask is where was the need for such a programme when we consider that the DOS, like every other university department elsewhere on the planet, has been teaching European sociology since the days it was first set up.

Earlier, intellectual dependence and servility came as a natural corollary of colonial rule. Today it is being welcomed because it comes buttered with hard cash. For cash-strapped universities mired in the now almost permanent age of structural adjustment, this appears to be the only option left for carrying on academic activity even if it means that one is forced to continue to make one's living by canvassing the products of other peoples' brains. There is not even a hint in the European studies centre proposal that it desires a partnership between equals or that Indians will help Europeans deal with Europe's own social problems of which there is an abundance: for example, the integration of minorities, relationships between ethnic communities, alienation, problems of care of retired employees, domestic violence and alcoholism, etc. We are still very much moving along a one way street – with all the movement from the "superior" or "advanced" culture at the core to the "inferior" or "deficient" culture at the periphery – because that is how knowledge continues to flow in the global university knowledge system.

No wonder UNESCO's *World Social Science Report 2010* concludes that for all practical purposes social science research outside the non-European world is so insignificant in quality it is rarely cited. The report, for example, points out that North America cited zero research from both Asia and Africa.[2]

Political imperialism may find fierce resistance today (Iran, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Egypt), but academic imperialism has not probably because it is almost invisible. On the contrary, it appears to have increased in intensity and outreach.

University departments and faculties in almost all universities of the globe have – voluntarily or involuntarily – continued to pay obeisance to the objectives and methodologies of social science generation prevailing in western academic circles (Alatas (2006:13) refers to the latter appropriately as "social science powers"). Their output even today continues to reflect principally the concerns of western scholars. Much of present-day social science

in non-European universities is nothing more than the mindless study and restudy of the dead corpus of sociological knowledge generated in response to ethnocentric or peculiarly European perceptions of situations often decades or centuries old.

Even where academic work in Asia of Africa may nowadays sometimes reflect local issues due to the efforts of individual researchers who wish to do meaningful, independent work, the methodologies applied and theoretical frameworks still remain firmly Euro-American in character. Independence from colonial rule has had little or no significant consequences except for providing opportunities to jockey and fight to occupy chairs left by earlier intellectual overlords. Naturally, there is very little evidence of creative thinking or work, considering all move and have their being in an intellectually sterile wasteland.

Since the social sciences as we know them today are little more than unquestioned European perspectives for European social problems using the peculiar research tools and methods associated with Europe's intellectual history, can they ever be useful tools for the study of other societies with a vastly different range of problems as well as human experience? And what is the "emotional" or "spiritual" connection between this body of knowledge and the lives of people living in societies outside Europe?

One of the major consequences of this state of affairs is its effect on students who register at universities in various countries. They come to perceive the standard diets prescribed in courses as foreign, with little or no meaning or relevance to the world around them, especially to their inherited knowledge systems or to the meanings attached to important elements of their culture. They therefore see themselves compelled mostly to parrot the language of the discipline, to ingratiate themselves into its set phrases, vocabularies, slogans, categories and concepts (which change, like fashion, every few years) so that they can regurgitate it confidently when their time comes to address students as lecturers or professors. Competence and confidence are acquired only after years of subordination, uncritical and unquestioning acceptance and indoctrination.

Moreover, in form, the university everywhere has also lost its original character and purpose and become an upgraded version of the factory school in which knowledge is simply disseminated as a given and the student has little scope to create or contribute anything of her own. The European study centre at Delhi will ensure that young students can go for an all expenses paid six weeks' stay in Europe during which they will be get an opportunity to sniff the latest terminology in fashion during seminars and become au courant with the latest researches and concerns of the European academic community which still assumes that it is at the very top of the hierarchy of the social science imagination worldwide.

The Historical Evolution of Social Sciences

The question few people ask is: why do Indians or Iranians or Chinese for that matter allow themselves to continue to be fed a diet of what Europeans or Americans decide is social science? Is it possible that they could survive for thousands of years without intensive know-how about social, political, scientific or military organisation? Why are we unable to resist the notion that European sociology or anthropology or American political science or psychology is some kind of absolute which cannot be questioned? Or are we simply too lazy to surrender this colonial inheritance and rethink anew?

It may be useful here to inquire (briefly) into how this situation arose in the first place.

The intellectual history of societies falling as colonies under the political domination of Europe and later, the US, shows two major phases. In the first phase, there is a determined assault on their intellectual and spiritual traditions which is often internalised and often uncritically accepted by the leading and influential sections of the subjugated population. In any event, they really do not have any choice.

Thereafter, in the second phase, there is an overt attempt to completely replace the indigenous systems with ideas associated with the experience of the coloniser – a routine feature of the exercise of power.

The methodology adopted for such cultural assaults was elaborated very powerfully in 1612 in a book by John Davies (1890:291), British attorney for Ireland. Though he was writing in respect of Ireland, Davies could have been writing about any other country that came under the political subjugation of colonial powers:

> The defects which hindered the perfection of the conquest of Ireland were of two kinds and consisted: first, in the faint prosecution of the war and next in the looseness of the civil government. For the husbandman must first break the land before it be made capable of good seed; and when it is thoroughly broken and manured if he do not forthwith cast good seed into it, it will grow wild again and bear nothing but weeds. So a barbarous country must first be broken by a war before it will be capable of good government; and when it is fully subdued and conquered, if it be not well planted and governed after the conquest it will soon return to the former barbarism.

The simple truth is there has never been a change in this principal approach of imperialism and its ways thereafter.

The assault on India's traditions, for instance, was first officially announced by William Wilberforce in his 1813 speech to the English Parliament in which he argued that the English must ensure the conversion of the country to Christianity as the most effective way of bringing it to "civilisation". The effort to Christianise the Hindu population fell flat on its face and proved to be one of the most abject failures of imperial governance.

In 1835, however, a profoundly new approach was crystallised in the form of a "minute" by governor general Babington Macaulay which became the foundation of the modern academic enterprise and proved to be successful beyond the expectations of both colonial and postcolonial rulers. In that influential minute, Macaulay summarily knocked down the entire intellectual output of India and Arabia in well-known words:

> I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanskrit works. I have conversed, both here and at home, with men distinguished by their proficiency in the eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education.

> It will hardly be disputed, I suppose, that the department of literature in which the eastern writers stand highest is poetry. And I certainly never met with any orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanskrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. But when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy, the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same.[3]

Macaulay insisted on installing a new system of education with a very specific set of goals:

> I feel with them that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.[4]

This well-known formulation of the objectives of the colonial education project coupled simultaneously with the display of civilisational arrogance was repeated ad nauseam in countries as diverse as Turkey, Indonesia, the Philippines, Aotearoa (New Zealand), etc. These became overnight "victim" societies or "defeated" civilisations and their leading lights readily applied this collective feeling of inferiority to the products of their minds as well. In the context of Africa, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981:3) wrote:

> The biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance [was] the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples' languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life.

Failure of Nerve

It is truly amazing to discover that so many educated segments in practically every colonised society could be so convinced eventually of their own – and their civilisation's – worthlessness, that they would allow themselves to be robbed of everything that their civilisations had to offer and then meekly submit to remould themselves in the manners and thinking of those who came from far outside their borders.

The scale of this civilisational failure of nerve was ultimately restricted in its reach for a rare reason: the difficulty the imperial power faced – as Macaulay himself admitted – in "educating" the entire population! In other words, we survived with our identity simply because most of us did not speak English, we continued to speak in our own mother tongues, and the majority of our populations had little interest in certifying themselves in western knowledge systems. They simply remained aloof, disinterested, unincorporated.

The result everywhere has been the generation of two wholly different societies owing allegiance to separate systems of knowledge and belief, even when they occupy the same single geographical space. In his remarkable work of anthropology *Mexico Profundo*, Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1996) made a critical reference to the "imaginary Mexico" imposed on that society by western scholars and academics. He called it "imaginary" not because it did not exist, but because it denied the cultural reality lived daily by most Mexicans.

According to Batalla, the lives of the "de-Indianised" rural Mestizo communities and also of the vast number of migrants living in the cities comprised what he called the Mexico profundo. This life was rooted in Mesoamerican civilisation based on its own food supply. Work in this society even today is understood primarily as a way of maintaining a harmonious relationship with the natural world. Health is related to human conduct and community service is often part of each individual's life obligation. Time is cyclical and humans fulfil their own cycle in relation to other cycles of the universe. You could say that for the Mexico profundo, Europe as a system of ideas to live by or as an ideal simply does not exist. Though Batalla's perception appears to be radical, his description of a society that functions distinct from the perceptions of overseas scholars and their local coloured cohorts could be applicable in every society of the non-western world. In our country, we call it the "other India" – larger than India – and in the deepest sense, concerned solely with itself and wholly unconcerned about Europe.

Eventually only two classes of people came to the conclusion that European science was the only successful foundation for the advancement of knowledge (and human welfare) in future. First it was the Europeans (naturally), thereafter, the educated among the colonised, especially the academic community and both for the wrong reasons.

It is an elementary principle of assessments and evaluations that they must always be carried out – in the interests of objectivity and credibility – by persons unconnected with them. A person cannot be a judge in her own cause. But what do we find here? The assessments and evaluations of the west, of western science, of the alleged dynamism and achievements associated with western history are made by intellectuals, historians and writers from the west. They unabashedly glory in their own achievements, they become their own historians, they propose their own greatness, and they themselves certify and celebrate the unique quality of their own way of life. The final act of hubris was a claim made fairly recently that American society symbolised "the end of history", the end of evolution; that there was no further stage of human progress necessary or conceivable except endless refinements in technology.

The absence of objectivity has been taken to such absurd lengths that often entire histories of various human activities (ethics, science and technology, the arts, etc) are compiled by western writers which do not take into consideration even the existence of people from other parts of the globe. This ignorance of the role and intellectual contributions of people living outside the boundaries of Europe is on occasion admittedly due to a narrow or parochial education. But more often than not it is also because admitting the intellectual contributions of others would downplay the west's own claim to self-directed development up the ladder of human progress due to its innate cultural superiority over the rest of humankind.

Western academic social science is not irrevocable, divine, infallible or bestowed with greater epistemological significance than other intellectual traditions or ethno-sciences. It only appears so.

The success of orientalist discourse has been in precisely this: the peoples of India, Arabia and other lands are today convinced that the best interpreters of their history, their societies, their traditions are scholars and commentators from the west rather than people in their own midst.

Distressed by this wholesale mental capitulation and surrender of an entire generation of intellectuals, Syed Hussein Alatas (2006) wrote – several decades ago – a stinging evaluation of what he called "the captive mind" in which he pilloried third world intellectuals for their continuing obsession with imported and handed-down theories of knowledge which had little to do with their societies, their experience and their own intellectual traditions.

"It is the final triumph of a system of domination", writes Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981:20) in *Decolonising the Mind*, "when the dominated start singing its virtues".

Significant resistance to intellectual colonisation eventually came not from this captive and enslaved class of university-based academics but from the most marginalised groups including the American Indians, the Maoris in Aotearoa (New Zealand), the aboriginals in Australia and Canada and a significant group of scholars from the African countries.

It also came from Islam, though in mixed ways, as most Islamic societies were eventually unable to resolve the issue of the compatibility of their religious traditions and western (secular, positivist, materialistically-oriented) knowledge. Muslims in fact got themselves certified in western knowledge systems in droves. Even today Muslim countries remain profoundly schizophrenic about their approaches to western knowledge, including philosophy, unable to restore the productive harmony between science and Islam that flourished during the west's dark ages. Materialist western knowledge – which denies the very existence of Allah – is taught side-by-side with Islamic theology, often within the same university.

Unquestioning Acceptance

In India, western science including western social science is accepted without question by its academic czars, signalling the complete intellectual defeat of its so-called thinking or academic classes. The country's (so-called) "finest" minds – those who qualify for IITs – are harvested in 13 imported institutions that serve as unabashed recruiting grounds for production systems and economies abroad.

After the US became the dominant force in the world economy, educational curriculum dominance shifted to American universities and their academic formulae became the new testament for the rest of the world, including now England. As the US naturally assumed control over what would constitute higher education, this implied that university content would now be sourced to patterns of thinking from a country which encapsulated little more than the worldview and concerns of a predominantly white male population which had established its dominance there through sheer uninhibited violence and which would tolerate the growth of only those other sections that were in grand sympathy with its views.

The problem faced by the white American education system in the 19th century was the lack of uniformity of what was being taught at different schools and colleges within the country. The diversity was finally settled by the report of the "Committee of Ten" set up in 1892 under the chairmanship of Charles W Eliott, President of Harvard University. The subjects seen as necessary for a proper university education for people growing in the United States were decided by this committee and they would thereafter rule the world of academia everywhere even up to our own times with minor modifications. The subjects and also the duration of time to be allotted for the teaching of these subjects were determined by the committee. (The nine subjects were: (1) Latin; (2) Greek; (3) English; (4) other modern (European) languages; (5) mathematics; (6) physics, astronomy, chemistry; (7) natural history; (8) history, civil government and political economy; (9) physical geography, geology and metereology.)[5]

What is important to note is that this attempt to create and enforce a uniform diet for all students of education in all countries – with diverse environments, intellectual histories and cultural traditions – was never questioned. The new curriculum was adopted everywhere because the modern university culture has retained a profoundly imitative or mimic character. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for example, relegated most academic scholarship in Africa to exercises in "apemanship and parrotry". (Rabindranath Tagore, India's distinguished man of letters, in fact, wrote a telling story about a parrot more than a 100 years ago in which he thoroughly parodied the educational system.)

In the new culture, the printed textbook as an essential tool for learning naturally reigned supreme because these academicians were more comfortable with books than with the real world from which the text could safely isolate them. This facilitated further "universalisation" claims since local experience was not considered necessary for theory and the theory in any case came always from western academia.

At no stage was there any critical questioning in our own societies of the directions in which the acquisition of knowledge had begun to proceed. Only the very prescient saw the terrible consequences for their own kind. A generally peaceful individual, Mahatma Gandhi (2008: 89) was so outraged by the idea of turning his people into second-class westerners that he declared in *Hind Swaraj* that "deportation for life to the [penal colony of the] Andamans is not enough expiation for the sin of encouraging European civilisation". As Vinay Lal (2002:143) notes, it is not at all surprising that the misery of human beings has increased in almost direct proportion to the spread of western social sciences – from anthropology to geography and economics – in the rest of the world.

Imperialism has thus remained an intrinsic feature of the world knowledge system. As Ward Churchill (2002:25) maintains in *White Studies*:

> The system of Eurosupremacist domination depends for its continued maintenance and expansion, even its survival, upon the reproduction of its own intellectual paradigm – its approved way of thinking, seeing, understanding, and being – to the ultimate exclusion of all others.

Even today the power to maintain this dominance continues to be exercised in the form of controls over the textbook trade, the

authentification of social science literature, the selective use or promotion of scholars, the suppression and discrediting of ideas from other intellectual traditions, unscrupulous misappropriation of such ideas when possible, and control of circulation of ideas through the peer group system which links both the publishing and journal industries.

This is the reason why Mahatma Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy, Aurobindo, Mao Zedong and other eminent persons all worked on revamping the educational systems they inherited as an important element of their *political* work. Gandhi introduced the system of Nai Talim, in which students would work with their hands and learn and earn while doing so.

These comments are about the educational enterprise as a whole. Now we shall take up some of the social sciences individually. But before we do that, we need to examine one specific issue, the problem of the assumptions behind the social sciences of our time.

The Framework of White Studies: A Critique

There is a popular Indian story relating to the foundations of our universe. Like most stories, there are several versions of this one depending on the purpose it is meant to serve. In my own favourite version, an Indian wise man is asked – what does the world rest on? His answer: a platform, which rests on a tiger. And on what does the tiger rest on – an elephant. And what does the elephant stand on – a turtle; and the turtle? Well, after that, says the wise man, almost in exasperation, "It is turtles all the way down".

Ask similar questions about science or social science or even mathematics: on what grounds are its body of propositions and methods based? Like in the turtle story, we find that every science rests finally on a set of assumptions which themselves are placed outside the realm of questioning or verification, or they rest on further assumptions or metaphysical or religious propositions.

An assumption, by definition, is a plank, a platform or a proposition whose truth we simply assume or take for granted, which can neither be empirically denied nor is open to scientific or critical scrutiny. Assumptions are not universally held beliefs, but "gospel truths" adopted by minority groups like members of specific scientific communities. In other words, we can never find the justification for why we use an assumption or rely upon it in preference to other assumptions except perhaps in extraneous grounds like utility or performance or explanatory power.

However, when pushed, we will quickly see that the idea of universalism or universally valid assumptions or propositions in the social sciences is false since such universals are created by human beings and therefore are as shaky and unstable as human beings and their products. The idea that fallible beings can create infallible knowledge about themselves is itself a methodological impossibility, a contradiction in terms.

If this is true, then every culture or body of knowledge is de facto enabled to raise its own universals, that is, principles that are adopted to guide its own civilisational discourses. On the very same grounds, it may dispute, reject or dispose of the intellectual products of other cultures especially where it is found to be necessary to reject the assumptions on which such knowledge is based or if such knowledge is felt or perceived to be irrelevant.

Nowadays, this discussion often takes the form of ethno-sciences and their relationship with so-called mainstream universals. Today, modernity or modern civilisation is identified with certain features which are also associated with or prevalent in the modern west. The basic idea is that there is a mainstream science and there are – within its tolerating embrace – various ethno-sciences. The problem with that view is that the so-called mainstream science, being culturally determined, is itself an ethno-science. It reflects the preoccupations and insights of one culture area, one group of societies that have adopted certain assumptions, principles and values. Once western sociology or political science is perceived as an ethno-science for these reasons, there will be progress.

Without politely declining to accept the Eurocentric assumptions on which modern social sciences are based, there can be no end to academic imperialism. Let us take a few disciplines in the social sciences and examine how extensively the structure of Eurocentric knowledge is firmly entrenched therein.

Philosophy Teaching

Asian and African universities have been offering graduate and postgraduate courses in "philosophy" for several decades. However, most philosophy departments in India and elsewhere today are facing a student famine.

This grim situation is not related only to the perceived uselessness of the subject of philosophy for employment, but also to the actual irrelevance of what is taught under the label of philosophy, to the country's concerns, philosophical activity in the country or to the pressing issues of our time.

Delhi University is a classic instance. This premier university of the capital city of India still teaches a course of undergraduate studies that comprises almost wholly of western philosophers and western philosophical issues and methods. Where occasional papers in Indian philosophy are offered, the coursework available is so sterile and unattractive as to dissuade anyone from taking interest. Indian philosophical thought is conveyed as something of a fossilised system of ideas: archaic, outdated, quaint, with key concepts in a dead language, property of indologists or sanskritists; or there could be attempts to show it as measuring up to modern western philosophical standards with equivalent detailed analysis of issues, e g, in "nyaya" and "navya nyaya". Thus for the present-day philosophy professors, their diet of issues for active philosophising comes almost wholly from the western academic tradition. The situation is hardly different in other universities or other countries of the south.

In *White Studies*, Ward Churchill (2002:25) makes the following observation about undergraduate studies in philosophy in the US:

> Consider a typical introductory level philosophy course. Students will in all probability explore the works of the ancient Greek philosophers, the fundamentals of Cartesian logic and Spinoza, stop off for a visit with Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, and John Locke, cover a chapter or two of Kant's aesthetics, dabble a bit in Hegelian dialectics, and review Nietzsche's assorted rantings. A good leftist professor may add a dash of Marx's famous "inversion" of Hegel and, on a good day, his commentaries on the frailties of Feuerbach. In an exemplary class, things will end up in the 20th century with discussions of Schopenhauer, Heidegger and Husserl, Bertrand Russell and Alfred North

Whitehead, perhaps an "adventurous" summarisation of the existentialism of Sartre and Camus.

Advanced undergraduate courses typically delve into the same topics, with additive instruction in matters such as "Late Medieval Philosophy", "Monism", "Rousseau and Revolution", "The Morality of John Stuart Mill", "Einstein and the Generations of Science", "The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty", "Popper's Philosophy of Science", "Benjamin, Adorno and the Frankfurt School", "Meaning and Marcuse", "Structuralism/Post-Structuralism", even "The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas". Graduate work usually consists of effecting a coherent synthesis of some combination of these elements.

Those students who have completed their undergraduate (and graduate) studies in philosophy in Indian or African universities will almost readily concede that they, with few exceptions, have been raised on precisely the same diet of exotic materials.

From Nigeria, Mesembe Ita Edet wrote in his book, "On the Teaching of Western Philosophy in African Universities":

> For four years the students are saddled right from their introductory classes with history of Western philosophy beginning with Thales in the ancient period up to the major characters of the contemporary period of Western philosophy...Students of philosophy...are treated to an overdose of the metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of history, philosophy of religion, of Descartes, Berkeley, Spinoza, Locke, Hume, Kant, Bentham, Hegel, Mill and other Western philosophers.

For the teaching and study of history, most universities have gradually reverted to their own civilisational stories. However, this is not so with subjects like philosophy and sociology. M B Ramose (2002:29) has noted that one could argue that western philosophy taught in the west could be contextual or even indigenous. But this could not be said about the teaching of western philosophy in Africa since it was decontextualised to the extent that it systematically and persistently ignored and excluded the experience of being an African in Africa.

Philosophers from Africa have in fact denounced key western philosophers as racists who wrote disparagingly against people of black colour. The list of western philosophers who were openly racist in their writings and even attempted to argue their convictions at length includes Aristotle, Bentham, Hegel and Nietzsche, Locke, Kant and Hume. African critics today are asking how academics could allow the writings of such philosophers to be taught to young African minds.

In India, there is some allegiance expressed towards Indian "spirituality", but real philosophy as a rule is only practised outside academia, under the tutelage of gurus, in places like ashrams.

In the year 2000, the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India reviewed the coursework in philosophy as part of its effort to revamp studies in 32 disciplines.[6] The UGC model curriculum for philosophy attempts to bring Indian philosophy on par with western philosophy: weightage-wise and time-wise, it appears that equal attention is now to be provided to both areas. The difficulty with the 50-50 approach is that it runs like a railway line, tracks side by side, with each side neither interacting with nor acknowledging nor battling the other, each using categories that are opposed to each other in fundamental ways. However, though the UGC model curriculum has been sent to all Indian universities for consideration and use, few universities appear to have worked with it, including Delhi University.

What is characteristic of curricula in Indian departments of philosophy is the teaching of western philosophy without a comparative discussion of its epistemological method or its assumptions or presuppositions. Western and Indian philosophies are studied independently without any attempt to see them as two fundamentally and methodologically different responses to a common problematic, or even as two different formulations of the same problematic. This approach does not permit one to see the Indian philosophical tradition in the context of history, as having a principle of motion, of dynamic reform and constant reformulation; the emphasis remains, by default, on an authentic but essentially fossilised Indian tradition. The overall scheme of western philosophy and its concerns over the ages remains the framework of philosophy studies in India. (Replace the term "philosophy" in the above sentence with any other term, like "sociology" or "anthropology", and the meaning of the sentence would be valid then as well.) It is taken for granted that this framework is basic, absolute, not to be questioned – the only developed tradition in comparison with which all others are ethnic, quaint, undeveloped anachronisms.

Exclusion of Non-Western Systems of Thought

When one goes behind to the assumptions that underlie western philosophy, there is an even greater surprise in store. Islamic and Indian philosophies are not considered "philosophy" by western philosophical schools because they both refuse to grant reason pre-eminence or primacy as a tool for achieving absolute truth. Islamic philosophy is labelled "theology", while Indian philosophy is relegated to the sphere of "religion", (as it is understood in the west). However, western philosophy itself bases its own premises on foundationless assumptions that are as fundamentalist, religious or theological as those it feels it can distinguish itself from.

We examined the philosophy coursework for undergraduates in universities like Harvard, California, Oxford, etc, and found that in these academic institutions only western philosophy is taught to the almost total exclusion of systems of thought from other parts of the world. In fact, philosophy is identified wholly and solely with western philosophers. In Indian and several other universities located in former colonies, the position is reversed: we suppress our own philosophical traditions and give principal attention to western thought. Our university professors are au courant with contemporaneous European philosophy issues, but are often cut-off from the philosophical obsessions of their countrymen and women from the rest of the Anglo-Saxon world.

Even where we do teach Indian philosophy, this is largely done accepting the west's standards and parameters of philosophical discussion. What happens if one argues that these different traditions (Indian, African, Chinese, western) are incommensurable, based on entirely separate sets of assumptions, with their foundations based on entirely different and irreconcilable faiths and convictions? This possibility should be brought into the classroom and the implications of the differences discussed.

Or what if one developed a philosophy course that enabled students to recognise that India's philosophical traditions answer questions that western philosophical traditions have failed to. Or

which enable students to see western intellectual traditions as intrinsically deficient or pointless, moving inevitably into blind alleys?

Economics' Teaching

Most universities today are committed to teaching an economics curriculum in which liberal economics with its doctrine of the markets and competition is considered mainstream knowledge. The idea of the "market" no longer refers to the diversity of institutions involved in the sale of produce (including bazaars and haats) that continue to thrive, nor is it associated with the liberal culture of the Samoothiri Raja of Calicut in 1498 when he protected the access of European traders to local markets during their first arrival in India. It is instead nowadays almost wholly associated with the western, liberal idea of the "free market" which paradoxically is being imposed on every notion by force. This has been the course ever since the installation of the "cartaz" by the Portuguese 500 years ago and continued as serious policy after the inauguration of the cold war.

Despite, however, living today in a world in which the cold war is over, the inherited framework of teaching a liberal economics curriculum remains intact even though the grand intellectual arguments or "science" behind the framework have collapsed on several occasions, the latest one being the recent (2008) US mortgage crisis and the manner in which the US government and other treasuries have shamelessly intervened to prevent the elimination of several inefficient and culpable agencies, entirely contrary to the very principles of liberal economics they preach relentlessly to the rest of the world.

Thus the fact that liberal economics continued to be taught as "gospel wisdom" owes really very little to any association of it with rational principles or with knowledge that can be sourced to any canons of objectivity. This is more in the nature of an ideology passed off as science. The bulk of this liberal economics corpus is largely an organised counter-response to another of their economists, John Maynard Keynes, who denied the central tenet of the capitalist system – that it worked best if left alone and kept beyond the interventions of government.

It has been well documented that the neoconservative F A Hayek was imported into England in 1931 from the Austrian school of economic liberalism solely to offset the influence of Keynes. His book, *Road to Serfdom*, published in the *Reader's Digest* in 1945, set out to prove that totalitarianism would be the natural consequence of admitting Keynesian economics, especially his proposals for full employment. But beyond this, we know that Hayek was instrumental thereafter in the formation of the Mont Pelerin Society, a semi-secret group of neoconservatives which desired to convert the next breed of intellectuals to neo-liberal doctrines. For the inaugural conference of the Society, besides Hayek, there was Karl Popper, Lionel Charles Robbins, Milton Friedman and other notables whose works continue to dominate and adorn the curricula of non-western universities. Of the 39 participants, 24 were from the US and UK and the rest from Europe. None came from the non-western world which would however soon receive much of the resultant academic blast. The conferences of the Society were thereafter held every two years. By 1980, participation had reached 600.

Despite its membership, the influence of the Pelerin society was not dramatic enough. Things changed with the arrival of Anthony Fisher, a successful poultry farmer (knighted by Thatcher in 1988). Fisher financed the start of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) and other free market think-tanks. The objective of the IEA was to propagate "sound" economic thought in the universities and all educational institutions.

In 1974, the IEA set up the Centre for Policy Studies and in 1980, the "social affairs unit", to do for sociology what the IEA had done for economics. More institutions mushroomed into existence including the Adam Smith Institute and the Heritage Foundation. Anthony Fisher (yes, the very same poultry farmer) became the first President of the Fisher Institute in Canada and in 1977 set up the International Centre for Economic Policy Studies in NY. To coordinate these "institutes", Fisher created the Atlas Economic Research Foundation to provide a central institutional structure. By 1991 it claimed to have helped, created, financed or advised in some way 78 institutes and had a relationship with 91 others in 51 countries. After the Berlin Wall came down, many of its key personnel moved into eastern Europe and the disintegrating Soviet Union to ensure that academic teaching there was rendered adequately hospitable to the virtues of capitalist economy.

The Mont Pelerin Society and Fisher's private army of free-trade think-tanks sponsored institutions propagating economic liberal philosophy all over the western world, and their economists became consultants and policy advisers to governments. They naturally exerted a great influence on the teaching of economics in non-western universities as well, as the latter had little confidence with their own understanding of economic systems.

In fact, "development economics" was originally invented in the west and then handed over to the south (Alvares 1992:95-100). Its assumptions were the same as those undergirding the economic assumptions of the western economies. The only difference was their rather uncavalier, unprincipled, irresponsible application to the countries of the south. The major "third world" development economists were all "first world" people: Bauer, Colin Clark, Albert O Hirschman, Arthur Lewis, Gunnar Myrdal, Paul Prebisch, Paul Rosentein-Rodan, Walt Rostow, Hans Singer, and Jan Tinbergen. These came to dominate the thinking on economics and development.

What link did these neoclassical and also sometimes Keynesian economists have with the problems of the south? Under normal circumstances they had very little link. The independence of colonies, however, and the transformation of these into new states, produced for these economists a fresh category of job opportunities: as advisers to the governments of the south. Mesmerised by the material possibilities evident in western civilisation, the mentally enslaved ruling elites sought help from those who, paradoxically, could least provide it.

Only much later would these experts confess that they were "learning", and that they therefore made serious blunders. These blunders formed the basis of policies which adversely affected millions of lives. They were also taught confidently at universities.

What were the elements of the development strategy? One would have to enumerate, unnecessarily, the cardinal tenets of conventional growth theory: the Harrod-Domar model, in which saving and investment were considered the critical element for growth (elsewhere, Maurice Dobb, too, had characterised capital accumulation as "the crux of development"). Similarly, the

Arthur Lewis model: how does one get a society accustomed to a 5% saving rate to attempt a 12% to 15% saving rate? Then there was the Clark Fisher hypothesis that economies advance as labour moves from primary, to secondary, to tertiary economic activity. Finally, foreign aid is the critical stimulant to move the south's stagnant economies out of any traps or vicious circles, brought on, for instance, by population increase. No thought was given to structural factors. Growth was supposed to be linear and automatic. Later, when the planners discovered theirs was too simplistic a model, they ruled that changes would be needed in values, institutions and attitudes: these would have to be replaced through social engineering as well. It is consoling to discover that they did not require an entirely new population to replace the existing one (which is what they tried to do when they advised us to go for Jersey cows, Yorkshire pigs and Leghorn chickens).

Development economics was thus nothing more than the north's mainstream economics applied to the south. It was hardly an intellectual tradition, but in the absence of an autonomous tradition, the experts merely drew from their own personal thinking in their task of changing the South.

Today, there is not a single person in the world who is not aghast at the continuing degradation of Africa's economies. Who trained Africa's economists? Were they Shamans from the Congo? Is there any convention of economic thinking in the heads of economists from India, Africa or Brazil which has not been put there by some opinionated godfather from the west? Today the diet of economic courses at universities remains such a hotchpotch of subjective economic pontificating, it is a wonder that it ever claimed the status of a "science" worth teaching in any university anywhere.

Psychology Teaching

There is no better example of the total disjunction between university curricula and public perception of useful knowledge than the teaching of psychology. Take a country like India. While literally millions (both from India and abroad) take instruction from gurus or come to India to learn yoga, or to listen to discourses by the Dalai Lama or his cohorts, psychology departments continue to be mired in the teaching and practice of wholly imported American clinical psychology.

This has not gone on without rebellion. During the last 50 years there have been several critics of the teaching of psychology from very different areas, especially Africa and India.

Scholars in Africa joined the Indians on the critique of Eurocentrism in psychology. Vernon Naidoo (1996:9-16), for example, declared that psychology teaching in Africa has been traditionally Eurocentric, deriving its insights for a white, middle class value system. The issues and problems concerning other social groups were non-existent among its concerns. He called for an Africocentric paradigm of psychology to contest the "Eurocentric substrate of psychology" and its "pretension to universality". He rejected the myth of sameness – that persons trained in monocultural perspectives could be able to apply their theory to all populations.

Other critics of the teaching of American psychology in Africa observed that white culture continued to serve as a foundation for counselling theory, research and practice. They defined white culture as "a synthesis of ideas, values, norms, beliefs and behaviours that have coalesced from descendants of white European ethnic groups".

As with political science, the general argument against working with psychological traditions in India or elsewhere is that even if they are effective as "therapy", there is an absence of a theoretical framework which can become the object of inquiry. However, it is important to recognise that such statements or opinions invariably come from intellectuals who have very little access to or experience with native psychological traditions and theories. Therefore they have very little understanding of these traditions either because of their limited or non-existent knowledge of local languages, literatures and texts. Similar unfounded assertions have been made not just about the indigenous psychological traditions of India, but of other disciplines as well.

Undoubtedly things are now changing due to the influence of multicultural studies and approaches in which white psychology is being questioned on grounds of applicability and relevance. The only problem with the multicultural studies approach is when it continues to evaluate and work within the conceptual and methodological bases of Eurocentric psychology. Not only is the European concept of science and research to be contested, according to Naidoo, but the focus on the clinical approach with its overemphasis on diagnosis and treatment of individual mental illness should be challenged as well. Psychology must be involved in broader health promotion.

Sociology Teaching

If today's psychology is almost wholly American (with all its displayed pathologies), the field of sociology is firmly entrenched in the methods, concerns, beliefs and experiences of Europe.

It is entirely inappropriate, if not ludicrous, to attempt to fit Indian social history into the confines of a sociology that has reflected the organisation of society in Europe during the last 300 years, there being in fact little interaction between the two, and when that happened, never on the basis of equality of any kind.

The most recent discussion of the extent to which Eurocentric discourse has infected sociology teaching in almost all non-white societies is to be seen in the work of Farid Alatas. In his book, *Alternatives Discourses in Asian Social Science*, Alatas identifies several key issues that can be identified with the present state of social science (many of these can be profitably applied in the other inherited or imported social sciences as well). I am listing some of them:

- The principal thrust of developments in social sciences continues to originate from the work of American, British, French and German scholars (the so-called Gang of Four social science powers). Universities in other parts of the world have reduced themselves to copying or studying the output of the social scientists of these main countries, including new ideas, selection of problems, methodologies and research priorities.
- For this reason, there is scant attention paid to local literary and philosophical traditions. These are invariably never considered as proper sources for concepts (theory) in the social sciences. The general habit is to neglect them altogether.

- There is the complete inability of social scientists outside of the Euro-American cultural area to generate original theories and methods while working in their areas. There is also a massive lack of confidence in this respect. There is very little capacity to create new theoretical models or methods.
- Western science models or theories or concepts are uncritically adopted and applied in societies, resulting in theories or works with little utility or value. We also face the problem of "auto-orientalism" in which orientalist ideas are themselves adopted as true pictures of non-western societies by scholars and intellectuals in non-western societies.
- Alatas observes that European discourses on non-western societies invariably tend to produce essentialist constructions of these societies, thus "confirming" that they are the opposite of what Europe represented and for this reason can be labelled "barbaric", "backward" and "irrational".
- Most social science perspectives are elitist. They focus on the dominant groups in society and their concerns. They do not take into consideration the existence of minority points of view. Neither do they look seriously at ethnic minorities, underprivileged groups or subalterns.
- Of course, most social science also aligns with the state and its concerns. In this sense, social scientists are mostly conservative, status-quoist. Once western anthropologists and geographers were handmaidens of the State. Today, their role is taken over by Indian or Malay anthropologists or geographers. The relationship with the state has remained untransformed (Alatas 2006:32).

Political Science Teaching

Almost all political science courses have originated from Europe or more recently, the US. PhD theses in our part of the world are compiled on any new idea or book on political science that comes out of the US. When David McClelland first came out with *The Achieving Society*, we all wrote theses on achievement motivation. Then he wrote *Power: The Inner Experience*. We all wrote theses on power. One could say the same thing about Michel Foucault, Derrida and a host of other European and American intellectuals. The intellectual dependence and enslavement is complete, and shameful.

This is again all the more surprising because hardly anyone in her right mind would deny that non-white societies have had strong political traditions. In India and China, for example, we have several influential political treatises including the *Book of Mencius*, *The Analects of Confucius* and the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya. However, political students are fed solely on a diet based on the importance of Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

It is incredible that epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, two of the most extraordinary texts on political science, are nowhere to be found in India's political science courses despite the fact that these texts are sources for discussions on philosophy, ethics and politics. In fact, in the *Mahabharata*, the discussion on the nature of violence takes place in the middle of the battlefield, with arrows flying about even while the main protagonists discuss finer points.

Despite some of these fairly harsh critiques (which have been around for some time), we still have the unedifying spectacle of a university like New Delhi's, located within the capital of an independent country like India, continuing with the unabashed display of its "captivation" of Europe's ideas and methods. Durkheim, Weber, Marx may be good for European universities. Like the impact of repeated coca cola advertising on TV, we too may eventually come to be convinced that these are great products, having value, especially when our English education succeeds in eliminating all other options and we are unable to access different thinkers simply because we are ignorant of their languages.

My question is what do we have in common with these economists, thinkers, sociologists, and political scientists? Why don't we simply admit that we accept their greatness simply because this has been dinned into us day in and day out? We ourselves have not come to any independent decision about them. How could we? These thinkers wrote first in German or some other European language a century or two ago. After that they were translated into English. We had to learn English or German to read them. None of them wrote in our mother tongue. So why don't we stop referring to them altogether? Would we be the poorer in any way? Would we not be liberated to do something more sensible than what we are attempting to do right now: to still examine the world through the filters they used to perceive and understand their world decades, if not centuries ago? Why do we submit that we cannot work and think without the mental crutches that we think only these ghosts can provide?

The primary agenda for any academic in the non-western world is resisting imperialism in academia, working to transcend Eurocentric discourse and Eurocentric frameworks of understanding and perception. If the result is social science that is more diverse, plural, less easily intelligible to everybody, more inscrutable to each and every member of the social science community, then so be it. (A good example of this is present-day writing by Maoris in English which is inscrutable unless one also digests and understands key Maori terms.) This would be an infinitely more interesting scenario – and more creative and productive – than the present system in which one homogenised way of thinking and doing, originating from and suitable for one small class of individuals in one or two societies, becomes the norm for everyone everywhere.

In the section that follows, I describe fairly briefly some efforts and proposals in the direction of a more diverse, plural, non-Eurocentric, social science.

Transcending Eurocentrism

For credible and meaningful work towards a non-Eurocentric social science framework, a firm prior decision or commitment to intellectual delinking from the existing theories and the corpus of Eurocentric and European social sciences is required at the level of each academic council or university. Serious efforts must be made to discuss culture-rooted and culture-acceptable assumptions for research and methodology, methods that are in harmony with our cultural values, environment and all life. We must relink critically with indigenous intellectual traditions.

(a) Thinking in terms of an "alternative discourse" could be misleading, as this could lead one to assume the continued existence of a "mainstream" discourse. It would be far better to imagine

instead a plural discourse – not derivative, not alternative but plural. This must be insisted on as a matter of principle. This would enable hundreds of social science flowers to bloom.

(b) Serious reorientation needs to be made towards thinkers who are not from European or American academic or cultural institutions but come from our own regions instead. Borrowing from the western academic tradition should be gradually replaced with confident foraging with our own traditions.

(c) As a practical exercise, encourage the writing of papers without using or citing western sources or books. If that is not possible immediately, reduce the citation rate from western scholars and enhance the citation rate from non-western scholars. Better still, encourage students to write papers without referring to endless sources, i e, show them how to do citation-less writing. The best literature in the world – stories – never carries citations. The truth does not need crutches. If you cannot make out a case based on your own experience and knowledge, no amount of quoting will help.

(d) Much clarity would also be available if we encourage a stricter use or labelling of social sciences. Use the words "European sociology" when discussing sociological work from Europe or Iranian or Islamic sociology or American sociology, etc, when discussing others. This will bring balance and confirm the idea that European social sciences are ethno-sciences, on par with other ethno-sciences. They may be good for Europe, but useless and meaningless for us.

(e) Prevalent and still influential Euro-American positivist methodologies must be critically reviewed and when required thrown out of the window. It is important to aim for the university as a creative centre of knowledge that will matter to human beings and other forms of life and where the ecology of the planet is overall respected. The university must be seen instead as a centre for equals to interact. This does not rule out dissemination entirely, or the conservation of useful and valid knowledge, but one will be conscious that the act of dissemination will always restrict creative approaches.

(f) Methodologies for research must include dialogue and far more diverse media than wholesale reliance only on lectures and textbooks. Textbooks in our time are a symbol of the degeneration of knowledge. They are a peculiar contribution of the university in the modern era. Reliance on them for knowledge is not to be placed on the same footing as reading texts like the Koran or the Mahabharata that have guided and inspired societies for centuries. In fact, these classics ought to be made basic texts for most disciplines and taken out of the sphere of mythology or religious texts as they discuss with great deal of competence all the major issues that fall within the domain of the social sciences.

(g) Exclude professional, western social scientists from doing research in our universities until there is a negotiated balance achieved for doing parallel research by our researchers in their universities on their societies.

(h) Above all, resist some present proposals that argue for western science being made more "inclusive", that is, for more efforts to be made to include facts from the non-western world into existing deficient frameworks in which the west continues to predominate. Such actions do not change anything since they leave the superstructure intact. They may improve the state of western knowledge, but they cannot improve the quality of ours.

Mere tinkering with existing curricula here and there will enable us neither to get rid of Eurocentric influence nor bring the spirit of creative science to our academic institutions. Delinking from both Eurocentric social sciences as well as European university teaching models will at least guarantee the prospect of a new beginning in which the universities everywhere reappropriate their predominant function of being centres for the creation of knowledge that serves the real life concerns of all the diverse peoples and societies of the world.

NOTES

1 See: http://www.iescp.org/index.php/events
2 The complete text of the UNESCO *World Social Science Report* can be downloaded from: www.unesco.org/shs/wssr
3 See: http://www.vvv03.com/Minutes.pdf
4 Ibid.
5 See: www.mathcurriculumcenter.org/PDFS/.../comm_of_10_summary.pdf
6 See: http://www.ugc.ac.in/policy/modelcurr.html

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'New' Lists for 'Old': (Re-)constructing the Poor in the BPL Census

INDRAJIT ROY

This paper aims to understand the implications of implementing the Saxena Committee's recommendations in respect of identifying the poor in India. Relative to the one currently in use, the application of the proposed methodology appears to be more beneficial in general to social groups such as scheduled tribes, most backward classes and mahadalits, as well as those landowning households that might suffer from specific debilitating conditions. However, in some cases it is less sensitive to Muslims, non-mahadalit scheduled castes and agricultural labourers. These observations are based on the results of a census survey covering 4,500 households in 18 rural wards of Bihar and West Bengal. By comparing the subset of households classified as poor according to the 2002 and the 2009 methodologies, the paper analyses "moving in" and "moving out" of poverty lists according to occupational categories, caste groups and landowning profile of the poor.

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1 Introduction: A Tale of Two Methods

Since at least 2008, there has been vigorous debate within Indian and international policymaking and advocacy circles about revising the mechanisms to identify the "poor" in India, so that social assistance may be better targeted. In August 2009, the government made public the Report of the Expert Group that was advising the Ministry of Rural Development on the methodology for conducting the new Below Poverty Line (BPL) Census for the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, which outlined the contours of the revised scheme for identifying those eligible for social assistance (GOI 2009). The proponents of the 2009 methodology argued that it represented an advance over previous methodologies for the following reasons: (1) The criteria proposed by it were more transparently verifiable. (2) The use of a combination of nominal and ordinal data, which allowed it to automatically exclude and include households from BPL lists, and also rank them so that different cut-offs could be applied to them. (3) It was far more sensitive to vulnerable households because of the in-built bias in its scoring in favour of such groups, as for example agricultural labourers, destitute households, mahadalit castes, women-headed households and those comprising entirely of aged persons.

Perhaps its strongest argument was that it suggested a way to identify the most vulnerable households without necessarily enhancing the overall resource outlay. Indeed, it was designed to make the task of identifying the poor more efficient, its proponents arguing that the indicators proposed had "the best chance of being *accurately* executed by government staff" (GOI 2009: 26, emphasis added). It was predicated on a deceptively simple premise – the inclusion of the poorest and most deserving households in any listing of BPL households and, correspondingly, the automatic exclusion of the "undeserving" poor. Its advocates argued further that the application of this methodology would lead to effective targeting of the poor, unlike the previous exercises where the methodology was not sensitive enough to either ensure that "deserving" groups were included, or to prevent the inclusion of obviously "undeserving" groups.

The motivation for the government's endeavours emerged from the mounting criticism levelled against the previously used methodology, mooted in 2002 and implemented in 2006.[1] The "2002 methodology" as we refer to it hereafter, consisted of a survey and measurement system that assigned "scores" to each household on the basis of 13 questions. In addition to ownership of consumer durables and means of production (which were staple in the two census surveys pre-2002), the survey now included